

Chapter 673 I'm Getting Married, Jessie! (Part One)

The evening sky was growing dim, cloaked in the velvet hues of impending twilight.

Matthew ran around the spacious backyard, his laughter filling the air. The puppy thrilled with the new space, zipped around after him, both of them completely engrossed in the game.

Marcus watched them from a distance, a quiet figure observing the boundless energy of the boy and his dog.

They continued their play until the yard had been thoroughly explored and the shadows grew long. Finally, Matthew, with the puppy in his arms, trotted over to Marcus.

"Dad, Minnie's got all dirty. Can you help me clean her up?"

Carefully, Marcus took the slightly muddy puppy from Matthew's arms, ready to tackle the mess.

The puppy was a bundle of softness, its fur like silk—except for its belly, which was tender and hairless. Just as Marcus started cleaning the playful pup, Matthew hurried back with a towel, his eyes full of anticipation.

Once Minnie was clean, Marcus, with a strong but gentle hand, scooped up Matthew and headed toward the villa.

Matthew, a mix of sheepish pride and affection, rested his head on his dad's shoulder, his fingers unable to resist reaching out to pet Minnie once more.

Downstairs, Melissa had slipped into more comfortable clothes and joined them, just as Matthew began to protest—why couldn't Minnie dine with them? Marcus, ever the patient explainer, tried to lay out the facts gently.

Minnie sat on a chair, wearing an expression of pure innocence as Matthew made his heartfelt plea.

"But Minnie's part of the family. Why can't she have dinner with us?"

Marcus, lifting an eyebrow, replied, "Minnie's a dog, buddy. Our food isn't good for her. She only eats dog food. And you know she can't sit at the table like we do, or use a fork and knife, right?"

Matthew's eyes, round and earnest, didn't waver. "But you could feed Minnie like you feed me when I was little, couldn't you, Daddy?"

At that, Marcus found himself at a rare loss for words.

In the end, with a droop in his little shoulders, Matthew placed Minnie back on the sofa before shuffling back to the dining table. Marcus watched the scene unfold and, feeling a twinge of sympathy, offered a compromise. "How about this? After we eat, I'll make a special little table for Minnie. That way, she can have her meals next to us. Sound good?"

Matthew's face transformed with hope. "Really?"

"You have my word," Marcus affirmed, a sincere promise to his son.

Melissa exhaled softly, a blend of fondness and exasperation in her voice. "You're spoiling him."

But Marcus just shrugged his love for his son clear as he responded, "It's no trouble at all. Besides, Matthew's not in pre-school until later this year. I want to cherish these moments."

Silence was Melissa's acquiescence.

Post-dinner, Marcus, Matthew, and Minnie disappeared into the tool room. There, they didn't just build a dining set for Minnie; they crafted a small bed, too, with Marcus taking the time to smooth down every edge until it gleamed.

Minnie, sensing the bed was her own, leapt onto it with joy, her tail a cheerful flag.

When the creations were complete, Marcus brought them upstairs,

sawdust sprinkling from his clothes, a stark contrast to his usually neat appearance.

He approached Melissa, who was poring over a financial report in her post-shower calm.

Casually, amidst the evidence of his handiwork he said, "I'm thinking of making a cushion and some other things for Minnie. Got any pink fabric?"

Lifting her eyes, Melissa took in the sight of him—

dusty, disheveled, but unmistakably content in his labors of love.

Caught off guard, Melissa paused before responding "I'll just order them on Amazon. They'll turn out better than anything we could make."

Yet Marcus was nonchalant, gently pressing "Matthew mentioned he'd like them more if you made them."

With a resigned nod, Melissa agreed.

At that moment, Minnie full of energy, bounded into the room and leaped into Melissa's arms, sniffing curiously at the financial report she set aside. Melissa quickly put that away to save it from the puppy's playful gnaws.

She petted the puppy with a smile and teased Marcus, "Seems like you're treating Minnie as if she were your little girl."

Marcus, with a hint of something deeper in his gaze, threw out a playful challenge. "What do you think about adding another kid to the mix?"

Melissa remained silent at the suggestion Marcus, sensing the weight of the moment, smoothly shifted gears. "I'm taking Matthew to the Civil Office tomorrow to change his name and address."

The words hung in the air;

Matthew was to take Marcus' last name instead of her own.

Looking into her eyes, Marcus spoke earnestly. "You know, we could just get married. I'm not looking for a stepmom for Matthew."

Before Melissa could reply, her phone disrupted the moment.

Jessie's name flashed on the screen.

She didn't take the call but instead look up at Marcus.

"What, is that a call from your lover? Need me to step out for a moment?"

Marcus' teasing was met with an eye roll from Melissa as she picked up the call. Jessie's voice, strained with emotion, resonated from the other end. "Melissa, how can you do this to me? My engagement is tomorrow. Tell me you'll beat my bachelorette party tonight, please. I need clarity."

Melissa suddenly remembered the significance of the date --

Valentine's Day was also the day of Jessie's engagement.

Sensing Jessie's disheartened mood, Melissa asked with genuine concern, "Hey, are you by yourself right now?"

Through her tears, Jessie lamented. "They've all left. It's like nobody cares about me anymore!"

Her voice trailed off into soft murmurs.

A somber tone replaced Jessie's on the line as someone else took the phone over. "Miss Brown, is this you? It's Elsie... Miss Green has had too much to drink and I'm afraid to call Mr. Watson. What should I do, Miss Brown?"

Elsie?

The same Elsie from Albert's villa--was Jessie there now?

A rush of urgency spurred Melissa into action. "Look after her, I'm on my way," she said quickly before hanging up.

She turned to face Marcus, who was already watching her, wood shavings still clinging to his clothing. "Jessie's not doing well. She's had too much to drink, and with her engagement tomorrow... I need to go check on her. Would you mind watching Matthew while I'm out?" Melissa's request was timid, edged with guilt.

Marcus brushed the debris from his clothes in a deliberate, unhurried motion. "And why should I do this for you?" he teased, challenging her.

Closing the distance between them, Melissa began to clear the sawdust from his shoulders.

"Please, as a favor to me," she asked softly, her voice a tender nudge.

His gaze locked onto hers, intense and probing.

As Melissa leaned in, hoping to coax him with a kiss, Marcus cut through the tension with a gravelly ultimatum. "Be back by midnight. My house, my rules. Understood?"

A flush of warmth spread across Melissa's cheeks as she nodded, a mix of embarrassment and relief.

Marcus' gesture was unexpected; he handed Melissa the car keys, declaring the vehicle hers from then on, citing its 'too girly' interior as his reason for disuse.

Melissa, caught between surprise and the urgency of her mission, neither accepted nor rejected the offer outright.

Upon arrival, the servant—Elsie—rushed to her, urgency in her voice, "Miss Brown, you're finally here! Miss Green has been in such a state—crying and yelling. We didn't dare call her family. It's best they don't know about this place.... They're likely unaware of her and Mr. Watson."

Melissa nodded, a silent understanding passing between them, and headed straight upstairs.

Pushing open the bedroom door, the pungent smell of alcohol hit her immediately. With a concerned frown, she asked, "Exactly how much did she drink?"